

Application of Northeast Utilities Service Company
for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility
and Public Need for a new 345-kV Electric Transmission Line Facility
between Scovill Rock Switching Station in Middletown
and Norwalk Substation in Norwalk

Testimony Of Deborah R. Witkin

On Behalf of

The Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven

January 13, 2005

Q. Ms. Witkin, please state your name, address, professional background and position at The Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven.

A. My name is Deborah R. Witkin. I am currently the President of The Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven. Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony on behalf of The Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven.

I am an attorney by training. For the last 18 years, I have been with Connecticut Legal Services, which is a private non-profit organization that provides legal services to low income individuals, where I currently serve as a Regional Director. While that is my day job, I am not here to represent that organization in any way.

Q. Please describe the history of your involvement with The Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven.

A. On a totally volunteer basis, I have been involved as what we call a “lay leader” with the Jewish Community Center of Greater New Haven (“JCC”). My personal involvement with the JCC began in 1986 when my daughter, Janine, attended Yeladim, the JCC’s day care center. Four years later, my son, Justin, also attended Yeladim. As they grew, they also attended the JCC summer camp.

My involvement as a lay leader of the JCC began when I served as chair of the Parents’ Steering Committee of Yeladim. In later years I served on the Board of the JCC and have held a number of leadership positions with the JCC, including Secretary, Vice President of Development, and Chair of the Business Plan Action Committee. I began my term as President of the JCC in June of 2004.

Q. Have you previously submitted testimony in this proceeding?

A. No.

Q. What is the purpose of your testimony today.

A. I am here today on behalf of the JCC to explain to you what impacts the proposed 345-kV transmission lines will have on our facility, both in regard to the JCC’s financial viability and survival, as well as its operation, and to give the views of the JCC on alternative routings and mitigation options that have, to my understanding, been presented to the Siting Council by the Applicants or others.

Q. Please explain the relationship between the proposed 345-kV transmission lines and the JCC facility and programs.

A. There is an existing CL&P right-of-way across the property of the JCC on which there are currently 115-kV power lines. That right-of-way and those power lines go right through the middle of our property. Our main building, which is 106,000 square feet and cost approximately \$10,000,000 to build, is 45 feet from the edge of the CL&P right-of-way.

The portion of our building closest to the power lines and the right-of-way is the wing of our building that is used for Yeladim. Yeladim is the day care and pre-school program that provides services from 7:00 a.m. in the morning to 6:00 p.m. at night for 125 children as young as three months and as old as five years. The program runs year round, five days a week. Two playgrounds associated with that program are located just outside that wing of the main building. The playgrounds are also approximately 45 feet from the edge of the right-of-way.

A second very important part of our facility is the summer camp. This camp facility is on the other side of the right-of-way. It consists of an in-ground swimming pool and in-ground wading pool, a building next to the pools that serves as a bathroom/changing facility and recreation activity center, and a base camp that is used for group activities, storage of camper belongings and the lunch area. There are also picnic areas, playing fields, trails and other areas of our property that are used in conjunction with the summer camp.

The JCC serves members who reside in 48 towns and cities throughout Connecticut. In addition to our Yeladim and camp programs, we provide after-school vacation day care to children, and educational/recreational opportunities for adults. Additionally, the JCC provides a senior citizen hot lunch program for seniors in the Jewish community of Greater New Haven. The JCC, through the generosity of some of its donors, also offers scholarships to approximately 270 families who cannot afford the services it provides for children and their families. The JCC currently counts 3,599 children under the age of 18 among its members. Of those children, 388 were enrolled in summer camp last year. The JCC operates an after-school program in which 119 children regularly participate. In addition, it operates the day care center, which I referred to before as Yeladim, in which 125 children are enrolled. The JCC also runs enrichment programs for 719 children. Attached to this testimony as Exhibit A is a site plan previously provided to the Siting Council which shows the location of buildings, the power line easement, ball field, outdoor pool, play grounds, basketball courts, nature trails, outdoor day camp facilities, outdoor day care facilities and recreational areas.

As shown on Exhibit A, the current power lines dissect the campus of the JCC. The edge of the right-of-way is approximately 45 feet from the daycare center playgrounds and classroom facilities of the JCC. The edge of the right-of-way is approximately 90 feet from the ball field and approximately 40 feet from the day camp/base camp.

Q. What impact would the proposed 345-kV transmission lines have on the JCC?

A. The JCC is dependent upon memberships, tuitions, program fees and contributions by supporters to survive. Our annual budget is \$5.2 million. We have run a significant operating deficit for the last five years. Only through special contributions from members of the community have we been able to cover that deficit and keep our facility operating. Thus, our financial health and our survival are matters with which I deal on a daily basis.

Both Yeladim and our summer camp are major sources of revenue for the JCC. Without that revenue, we could not operate, and without a replacement source of that revenue, the JCC would have to close down.

I am aware of the testimony that the Siting Council has heard with respect to the relationship of EMF, generated by power lines, and childhood leukemia. I am not an expert on those issues, nor am I able to add any significant knowledge on that issue to what the Siting Council has already heard. However, based on that testimony, the leadership of the JCC and I believe that serious issues have been raised regarding the health of the children who use our facility and the financial viability of the facility itself, with respect to the impact of the new proposed 345-kV transmission lines and their location.

Prior to the proposal for new 345-kV power lines, parents, in deciding whether to use our facility for their children, have asked questions about the power lines. We were able to answer those questions based on information that my predecessors received from the United Illuminating Company, and while some people may have decided not to use the facility because of the powers lines, many people obviously have decided to do so. However, even the perception of safety is vital to the JCC's viability. News regarding the new high voltage lines is raising much more concern and we have heard already from some families that if the new power lines are put in, they will pull out of the Center and its programs. Given our financial state and the fact that children's programming represents 47% of the Center's revenue, any reduction in this revenue could have fatal consequences to the Center.

Q. What solution to the application to construct the 345-kV transmission lines in the vicinity of the JCC campus does the JCC recommend?

A. As a leader of the JCC, and in my view as a fiduciary for its members and employees, I believe that it is critical that the power lines be placed in a manner that is safe, and that such placement be perceived as safe by our members.

In light of that, the JCC strongly urges the Siting Council to place underground the power lines in the vicinity of the JCC. It is my understanding that the Legislature has ordered that when facilities are used by large numbers of children, the preference is to place power lines in the vicinity of such facilities underground if feasible. Again, I am not an expert on the technical aspects of electric transmission, but I urge the Council to do all necessary work to determine if it is in fact feasible to place underground the lines in this area. In that respect, it is my understanding that the Applicants have recently submitted a report to the Siting Council called the ROC Report which states that, in the Applicants' opinion, it is feasible to bury the power lines only from Norwalk to Milford. It also is my understanding that the Siting Council has used its own expert, KEMA, which has not had an opportunity to do its own independent analysis of whether the concerns that the ROC Report raises concerning additional undergrounding are legitimate or can be eliminated or mitigated. The JCC strongly urges the Siting Council to take the time to have additional studies done to determine if it is possible to place underground the lines that run through

the JCC's campus. Also, we believe it is critical that the Siting Council authorize its own independent experts to do the studies and analysis necessary to determine if such undergrounding is feasible. Both the statute passed by the Legislature and the health of our children demand no less.

Q. If the Siting Council determines that underground lines are not technically feasible in the vicinity of the JCC, then what solution would you recommend?

A. We have a very difficult problem at the JCC campus because it is not possible to move the power lines farther away from our main building without destroying the use of our Camp. In fact, one alternate route that was presented to the Siting Council by the Applicants proposed that the power lines be moved away from the main building and put directly over the camp. That proposal is not in any way acceptable to the JCC. It is self-evident that we cannot operate a camp under power lines, and I believe it may even be a violation of law. Further, we all know that EMF levels are highest under the power lines so it cannot be a feasible alternative to place the very power lines of concern immediately over a camp where children are going to be present throughout the day.

Moving the power lines farther away from the main JCC building would reduce the problems for those using the main building, including the Yeladim day care center and the playground attached thereto. However, that is only possible if the day camp is moved.

The JCC simply does not have the financial resources to move the day camp. Further, there is no space on the land we currently own to which we could move the day camp.

I am aware that one of the Applicants, Northeast Utilities, owns property adjacent to our campus. It may be a viable solution to have the Applicants move the day camp onto the Northeast Utilities' property so that the power lines can be placed where the existing day camp is now located and farther away from the main JCC building. I am not aware of any studies that have been done to determine if the topography, soil conditions, or other factors would permit such a relocation, but I am not aware of any reason why it could not be done. I am told that in order to move the day camp onto adjoining property, there may be zoning issues as well.

Q. Would the JCC support the moving of its day camp to permit the new power lines to be farther away from the main JCC building?

A. Yes, the JCC is not opposed to moving the day camp onto adjoining property with comparable facilities, if it can be done, as long as the Applicants pay the costs of such a move, and if this would result in the proposed power lines being installed farther away from the JCC main facility. I am not aware of any other possible relocation of the power lines that would address the concerns with respect to exposure of our children to EMF on the JCC campus.

Q. In light of all of your testimony and your knowledge of the JCC, what do you recommend the Siting Council do?

A. I want to emphasize that while I have discussed the possible relocation of the proposed overhead lines, I strongly believe that the preferable option is to put the power lines underground.

Q. **Do you have any further testimony?**

A. On behalf of over 2300 families, including more than 3500 children, who use our facilities on a regular basis, I urge you to take the time to have the necessary studies done by the Siting Council's independent expert to determine the feasibility of placing underground the lines that run through the JCC's campus.